

A New Zealand Industry.

A valuable product, confined absolutely to New Zealand, is the fossil gum known as kauri, which is employed in the manufacture of varnish.

A proof that the industry in question is really important is afforded by the fact that it employs at least 7000 workmen, of which 1500 are Austrians and a large number Maoris. The said product is found only in the northern portion of the provincial district of Auckland from the North Cape to Middle Waikato. It occurs in various volumes, from the size of a nut to a piece weighing 45 kilos. It has been exploited since 1860, and a total of 1046 tons was exported, but it must be stated that at that epoch its value was not very great, for it was sold at 230 francs per ton. Since then the exploitation has assumed enormous dimensions, the exports have risen to 8705 tons in 1892, but, by reason of this heavy exploitation, the product has become rare, and its price has advanced greatly.

The method of seeking this gum and the tools required are very simple. The workman uses a sort of harpoon to probe the ground, and if he recognizes the presence of gum, he digs down with a spade and takes out the precious substance. It is doubtless owing to the simplicity of the method that so many have devoted themselves to this work, which threatens to cause this industry to disappear ere long. The kauri gum fields—at least those exploited at present, cover an area of only 325,000 hectares (1 hectare equals about two and a half acres). For several years already the exports have been decreasing.

The Government is alarmed at the situation and has nominated a commission which is charged with studying the measures to be taken. At first it was proposed to place an export duty on the gum, but the result of this measure would be merely to stimulate the completion of foreign gums. It is probable that it will be soon decided to give licenses for digging up the gum only to persons who have lived in the colony for a certain time.

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